

June 9, 2015

## New Training Helps FCPD Officers Expand Understanding of Mental Illness



*Officers experience “voices” during class exercise*

### **Twenty officers wore iPods and “heard voices” on Monday morning, June 8.**

With dark, whispering voices in their heads, officers were asked simple questions, performed tasks, and learned what many people with schizophrenia and other mental health issues live with.

The exercise served as the introductory session for a week-long training, designed to provide officers with a broader perspective and clearer understanding of in-depth mental illness and the harsh, difficult realities that those suffering must contend with each day. This session was led by Dr. Tom von Hemert, a renowned expert in the mental health field and CIT program coordinator based in the Charlottesville area.



*Chief Roessler addresses the importance of the CIT Team training to class participants.*

The overall goal of the new Criminal Justice Academy's Crisis Intervention Team Training (CIT) course is to improve police interactions with people experiencing acute episodes of mental illness. The training was designed to educate and prepare law enforcement officers who come into contact with people in crisis, to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness and to respond effectively and appropriately to the individual.

The training features a variety of speakers and scenarios including: former members of the U.S. military who have experienced severe mental trauma and PTSD who address veterans in crisis, a visit to the psychiatric in-take unit of the adult detention center, and a father of autistic children, who will help officers better understand communications issues concerning autistic individuals.



*Class participants expressed their impressions to members of the news media, who were invited to the opening exercise.*



*Tom von Hemert, CIT expert, discusses mental health training issues with Colonel Roessler during a class break.*

### **Background on CIT within the Fairfax County Police Department:**

CIT has been provided to law enforcement officers in the form of in-service training at the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy since 2008. Subject matter experts from Woodburn Mental Health, Mobil Crisis, Community Service Board, et al., serve to not only provide training but to answer questions and expand on officers concerns and experiences.

Currently, 476 Fairfax County police officers have attended the 40-hour CIT program. Of the 476 officers who have attended CIT, 397 of them are assigned to patrol. To date, 397 officers represent approximately 43% of the patrol bureau; the first responders to any given call-for-service. An ambitious goal to train 100% of all sworn Fairfax County police officers in CIT will take time but the return-on-investment is substantial and long lasting. In addition to training experienced officers, the Criminal Justice Academy is vested and committed to train each basic recruit class the fundamentals of CIT. The goal is to ensure every officer has the skillset needed to successfully and efficiently respond to and identify individuals suffering from mental health issues. To meet this goal, the department is working with local and statewide mental health partners to maximize effectiveness and to stay current with best mental health practices. Upwards of 25 DCJS certified instructors plan to attend specialized training provided by our mental health partners in the near future. Those instructors will in-turn assist them and augment future training for law enforcement officers.

The ability of the Fairfax County Police Department to best serve its residents is leveraged by the training employees receive. CIT is an invaluable opportunity to enlighten department personnel to differentiate between criminal behaviors and those who are suffering from mental health/crisis issues. With the support and commitment of the community, mental health partners and the police department, CIT will help recognize and improve mental health concerns and identify solutions to a growing problem.

<https://fcpdnews.wordpress.com/2015/06/09/new-training-helps-fcpd-officers-expand-understanding-of-mental-illness/>